

# Shelter could be first of many

Kelly Deeks

Landcorp Farming has built a Herd Home® on one of its nine Moutoa Dairy farms near Foxton. Brian Wilkinson, Landcorp's farm business manager for the Moutoa dairy unit, Landcorp is always looking to be innovative and, if this HerdHome® is a success, will look at rolling out more across the complex.

A local builder began construction in March,



## 4th-generation farmers



Stewart Weatherstone plans to peak-milk 2950 cows on the home farm at Tuhitarata, near Featherston, next season.

season they are aiming for 370kg per cow, which works out to 1550kg per hectare. The couple have three children: Isla, 9, Edward, 7 and Vienna, 3. So what are their plans?

"Consolidation," says Stewart with a laugh. "Sustaining what we've got. "Irrigation will be the key to better utilisation of the farm, but where the water is coming from we're not sure yet."

using materials supplied by HerdHomes® Systems. "It will be large enough for 300 cows, and our plan is to winter everything at home on that farm," Wilkinson says. "We also plan to use the HerdHome® in the autumn and do all our feeding out in there." The cost is around \$600,000, and Landcorp is expecting a 12.5 per cent return over 10 years, as well as the benefits of comfort for the cows and a reduction in the nutrient footprint.

Wilkinson has been with Landcorp for eight years; he was hired to oversee the transition when Landcorp decided to replace the 50:50 sharemilkers on the nine Moutoa farms with managers. "It has worked really well and we've exceeded everybody's expectations," he says. "We're directly involved with all the managers



PHOTOS – Above: Gavin Payne and farm consultant Helwi Tacoma get alongside the cows. Left: Cows enjoy a taste of turnip; Lower left: Break feeding.

and staff. We set production goals together rather than each having individual goals." There are 4700 cows across the 1400-hectare Moutoa Dairy Unit; the farms range in scale from 200 cows on 60 hectares, to 1000 cows on 280ha. The smaller farms are used to train managers. "All the farms are neighbours and that creates a bit of competitiveness, which is healthy," Wilkinson says. "When we started, we had a goal of achieving a total of 2 million kilograms of milksolids, which we did a couple of years ago. "This year we're looking to produce 2.1 million kilos of milksolids, which equates to about 1500kg milksolids per hectare and 440kg per cow." One of the major benefits of the group being close together is what managers can learn by looking over the fence, or talking to one another. And, if one farm or manager performs well, the others follow suit: "The managers are competitive

by nature and desire to constantly improve." Pasture harvesting has always been a priority. Wilkinson says the unit is now growing a lot more grass and is much better at using it. Chicory was introduced into the pasture mix and low pH levels are addressed with dressings of lime to help lift grass production to an average of 16 tonnes of dry matter per hectare. Turnips and maize crops are grown as supplements for the long summer. "We make sure we eat everything and we leave behind nice residuals," says Wilkinson. "We do quite a lot of pre-topping. Before the cows go in, we cut the grass so that they require a lot less energy to eat it, and eat a much bigger mouthful. "It's a bit controversial. We're spending time and money harvesting the grass, but we've done all the numbers and we make good money out of it."

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